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# **SNOHOMISH COUNTY DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION ASSESSMENT**

An Internal Look at Workplace Practices

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August 2019

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Snohomish County  
Equity and Inclusion Task Force

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# Acknowledgements

The Equity and Inclusion Task Force would like to thank staff from the Executive's Office for guidance in formulating and administering this assessment. We also would like to thank leadership and staff from Human Services, Planning & Development Services, Public Works, and the Sheriff's Office for their participation throughout all phases of the assessment. Additionally, leadership and staff from the Department of Information Technology, Human Resources, Juvenile Court, the Snohomish County Human Rights Commission, and the Public Advocate provided valuable feedback during initial phases. Lastly, we would like to thank the staff who participated in the focus groups, generating discussion and ideas which ultimately lead to many of the recommendations within this assessment.

The Task Force benefited from previous efforts within the county as well as prior members who participated in the initial formation of this task force. We look forward to continuing discussions and idea sharing opportunities with staff, department leadership, and the Executive's Office in the months and years to come.

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***“When we listen and celebrate what  
is both common and different, we become a wiser,  
more inclusive, and better organization.”  
-Pat Wadors***

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This diversity, equity, and inclusion assessment is the culmination of over a year's worth of work and collaboration between the Equity and Inclusion Task Force and leadership from some of the largest departments in the county, conducted at the request of Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers. Through a series of meetings with department leadership and focus groups with county employees, we have identified practices that individual departments have successfully implemented, which can be replicated countywide. These meetings also brought to light areas where continued diversity, equity, and inclusion work is needed. These areas have been distilled into assessment findings. Based on these findings, we assembled recommendations comprising a coordinated effort to increase workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Although officially named the "Equity and Inclusion Task Force," we have included "diversity" as a term and topic in our work. Diversity is the starting foundation; unless we acknowledge diversity—both as something to be celebrated and as an area for advancement—we are unable to even begin to address equity and inclusion.

## Findings

Findings are grouped into four categories, identifying current efforts as well as opportunities for growth.

### **Leadership and Transparency**

All departments are making efforts to promote outward, community-facing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, comparatively less internal work is being done to increase the diversity, equity, and inclusion competency of staff and/or to create a more equitable and inclusive work environment. Leadership and staff indicated a need for shared definitions, vision, and goals as well as inter-departmental collaboration to continue moving this work forward internally.

### **Recruitment and Outreach**

Departments somewhat paradoxically reflected progress on recruitment and outreach for job opportunities while also acknowledging that there is a great need for additional support and resources to attract and retain a diverse workforce. Staff indicated that changes are needed to make recruitment efforts more accessible to diverse candidates.

### **Training**

Department leadership and staff all voiced a need for training on this work. There was a strong desire for standardized training tools that can be used countywide to establish clear expectations and assist in the training of staff. Several staff members suggested specific topics for trainings as well as titles of trainings that they have attended (either department-sponsored or on their own) and have found particularly helpful.

### **Retention**

While department leadership and staff shared their knowledge of current inclusionary practices within the workplace, one initiative stood out across all phases of the assessment: the presence of department-specific lactation rooms and support by management. The need for greater flexibility in work schedules and ability to work remotely were identified as some of the most mentioned "needs" by staff, along with the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms and a work culture that values, celebrates, and honors diversity.

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## Recommendations

These recommendations are varied, and will require different levels of resources to carry out the work. These follow the same broad categories identified in Findings, and introduce a number of opportunities for continuing diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused practices across Snohomish County.

### **1. Leadership Expectation and Vision on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts**

- 1.1: Adopt definitions and visual depiction of diversity, equity, and inclusion
- 1.2: Champion diversity, equity, and inclusion through leadership and accountability
- 1.3: Continue and expand Executive Office communications
- 1.4: Expand collaborative efforts and opportunities between departments

### **2. Human Resources and Hiring Practices**

- 2.1: Implement strategic job outreach and recruitment efforts
- 2.2: Evaluate and modify NEOGOV practices
- 2.3: Request Legal Guidance on the Washington State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Act (Initiative 1000)
- 2.4: Restructure the Human Resources Department

### **3. Ongoing Training Opportunities and Continuously-Available Resources**

- 3.1: Develop a diversity, equity, and inclusion training toolkit
- 3.2: Create training coordinator position(s)

### **4. Retention of Staff through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens**

- 4.1: Implement infrastructure changes around the county
- 4.2: Increase transparency and equitable access, including participation in decision making and knowledge sharing
- 4.3: Create and support an environment that appreciates diversity

## Next Steps

The Task Force recommends that this assessment serve as the foundation from which we will continue our work over the coming years. Our recommendations are intended to be broad overviews, but we have already begun discussing the development of specific action items, schedules, reporting goals, and implementation efforts for each of the recommendations. We look forward to discussing the prioritization and implementation of these recommendations with the executive.

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# Introduction

The Snohomish County Equity and Inclusion Task Force (Task Force) is pleased to present the following assessment of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts within Snohomish County government.

## About the Task Force

Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers formed the 11-member Task Force in January 2018. The Task Force was created to include staff from various departments, and currently represents many of the larger departments across the county (Human Services, Juvenile Court, Planning and Development Services (PDS), Public Works, the Public Advocate, Auditor, Prosecuting Attorney, and the Sheriff's Office).

Executive Somers stated that he envisioned that the Task Force's responsibilities and goals would include:

- Participating in and recommending education and training opportunities that serve to strengthen cultural competency and equity within county government.
- Assisting with conducting an assessment and gaps analysis of equity and inclusion work within county government.
- Recommending changes to work practices, policies, programs, procedures, and measurement systems throughout the county through an equity lens.
- Supporting efforts to increase employee engagement to ensure a safe, supportive, diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace.
- Supporting efforts to ensure county government is representative of the diverse communities we serve.
- Identifying opportunities to improve employee recruitment and retention.
- Researching and identifying opportunities for guest speakers, events, and community conversation sessions.
- Promoting community interest and inclusion within the county's boards and commissions.
- Providing county elected leadership with an annual report on the Task Force's work and progress.

The county has also established the Snohomish County Human Rights Commission (HRC), which serves as an advisory body in matters concerning human rights. In order to reduce duplication of efforts, the Task Force's focus is internal on county operations and practices. However, the Task Force communicates regularly with representatives from the Executive's Office to learn about external efforts and to identify areas of potential collaboration.

Since its formation, the Task Force has:

- Developed and approved internal bylaws.
- Developed work plan priorities.
- Adopted working definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Created several subcommittees to foster partnerships and conversation to help leverage resources.
- Met with leadership from departments represented by the Task Force as well as other departments and offices to learn about their efforts, programs, and initiatives relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Completed this multi-phase assessment.
- Presented a variety of recommendations to the executive based on assessment findings.

## Assessment

The primary work of the Task Force has been to conduct and compile this assessment and to develop recommendations to inform the executive of diversity, equity, and inclusion measures that are currently working well within the county as well as areas where gaps exist. The assessment focuses on the county as an employer and its internal operations; it does not assess the county's efforts or effectiveness in serving the external

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Snohomish County community. The assessment includes internal county actions and identifies strengths, successes, ideas, and recommendations compiled from department leadership, employees, and Task Force feedback, all of which have been distilled into actionable steps that will help the county advance an equity lens across internal interactions.

### Definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Although officially named the “Equity and Inclusion Task Force,” we have included “diversity” as a term and topic in our work. Diversity is the starting foundation; unless we acknowledge diversity—both as something to be celebrated and as an area for advancement—we are unable to even begin to address equity and inclusion.

As mentioned in a letter to Executive Somers, the Task Force realized that it was vital for us to be in agreement on what we mean when we talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Similarly, using consistent terminology and having shared understanding of definitions has been vital to the integrity of this assessment. In this assessment, The Task Force uses the following definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- **Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Diversity brings together ideas from people of varying backgrounds and experiences in order to grasp a fuller, broader range of thoughts, feelings, and interactions among members of a community. **Diversity means representation.**
- **Equity** is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. It is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. Equity does not mean everyone receives the same, but rather that everyone has the same access to shared resources. **Equity means access.**
- **Inclusion** is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. It means everyone can participate and everyone belongs. Inclusion recognizes our universal similarities and interdependence, despite our differences. **Inclusion means belonging.**

The Task Force introduced these terms and definitions to leadership and staff members for the purpose of this assessment. We have not distributed any written materials or graphics, nor have we indicated that these are for any purpose other than working definitions for completion of this assessment. Terms and definitions are further discussed in the recommendations section of this report.

## Methodology

The Task Force began by researching various assessment approaches which could be used to fulfill the executive’s request as outlined above. Assessment approaches included a range of options, including a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), root cause analysis, performance metrics, gaps analysis, and asset mapping, all of which have various advantages and disadvantages. Since the Task Force is newly created and has not yet established relationships with departments, and due to limited time and

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resources, it was decided that a pilot assessment relying on a strengths-based approach be utilized to build trust with department leadership and create a foundation for engaging in conversations about implementation of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. A strengths-based assessment is an assessment of strengths and inherent resources. The goal was to start by recognizing and promoting the existing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by the departments represented on the Task Force.

## Assessment

The Task Force recognized that we already had some buy-in with the departments that we represented, since our leadership had supported our participation on the Task Force. Therefore, we decided that the pilot assessment would begin with those departments represented, which, at the time, included Public Works, PDS, Human Services, and the Sheriff's Office.

A table of existing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and summaries of meetings with each of these departments and groups can be found in Appendix I of this report. It is the hope of the Task Force that this pilot assessment will provide actionable recommendations for the executive to move forward, and can also serve as a template if future assessments with additional departments would be beneficial. The Task Force wishes to implement the recommendations of this report and to conduct another assessment with different departments at a future date.

We acknowledge that there are many other departments and efforts working to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within our workplace. Due to time limitations, we were unable to meet with and include several other efforts for this assessment. However, we will continue to schedule meetings with additional departments/offices interested in sharing their work with us, in an effort to continue learning.

This pilot assessment consisted of three phases, outlined below.

### Phase One: Interviews with Department Leadership

During this phase, Task Force members met with the leadership from Human Services, Public Works, the Sheriff's Office, and PDS. The intent of these meetings was two-fold: first, to better understand the role of each department within our greater Snohomish County government and second, to develop a baseline understanding of specific diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and initiatives currently underway. During the meeting, leadership from the various departments shared with us an overview of what they are working on, what has worked well in the past, and their ideas for the future. The meetings were conversational and provided opportunities for the leadership to get to know the Task Force and learn more about our role and efforts.

### Phase Two: Department Leadership Follow-up Meetings

The goal of the follow-up meetings was to continue the discussions that started during the first phase. The Task Force asked to meet with leadership as well as each department's designee who works on hiring or retention on behalf of the department. The follow-up meetings were more structured, and at least two Task Force members were present during each of the meetings. The focus of this phase was to learn more specific information about each department's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals and how they are achieving them. Leadership was also asked about what resources they have, as well as what resources are needed, to help meet the department's diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Finally, departments were asked about their process during the past five years, and were asked to identify the effort they were most proud of as well as the biggest barrier to diversity, equity, and inclusion that they face.



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### **Phase Three: Staff Focus Groups**

To gain a fuller picture of the impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in these departments, the Task Force also conducted two focus group sessions with county staff. We invited staff from the departments who had participated in the first two phases of the assessment to the voluntary focus groups. The focus groups were highly structured, strengths-based, and completed with the intent of capturing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts currently underway within departments and the county as a whole as well as ideas from staff about ways that we can create a more inclusive work environment for county employees in the future.

As participants arrived, Task Force members verbally verified employment in one of the represented departments, and provided each participant a questionnaire to complete prior to the participation in the group. These questions mirrored those that were presented during the group discussion, and the questionnaire was provided ahead of the discussion time so participants could begin to formulate their responses.

After the Task Force presented a brief background on the assessment and shared working definitions for the meeting to promote a common understanding of how we were using the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion, the attendees provided responses (through the questionnaires and focus group discussion) to three main questions:

- Are you aware of any diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts or initiatives occurring within Snohomish County as a workplace? Do you know of any efforts or initiatives by your department?
- Which of these examples do you feel are working well?
- What ideas do you have of ways that equity and inclusion can be promoted in the work place? These may be ideas you've read about, heard from other department employees, or have seen on TV.

Over the two days of focus group sessions offered, a total of 17 county employees attended and provided valuable feedback. Each of the two focus groups divided participants into smaller groups in order to facilitate active participation during each hour-long lunchtime session.

### **Additional Meetings**

In addition to the three phases of the assessment, the Task Force met with other departments, offices, and commissions (Human Resources (HR), the Public Advocate, and a representative from the Snohomish County HRC) to provide additional context as we began learning about diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and challenges within Snohomish County. The Task Force also met with the Department of Information Technology (DoIT), which previously was represented by a Task Force member, and Juvenile Court, which is currently represented on the Task Force. These two additional departments were unable to complete all three phases of the assessment at the time of publication.

The additional presentations from HR, the Public Advocate, Snohomish County HRC, and DoIT are not included in the report's data analysis, but the ideas and issues generated in these meetings are incorporated into this report's recommendations.

### **Review of Other Jurisdictions' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Practices**

The members of the task force bring significant previous experience in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in their communities and prior workplaces. In addition to earlier trainings and resources, the Task Force relied upon several resources to assist in the creation of this assessment and the formation of recommendations. Task Force members reviewed efforts of other jurisdictions and learned from several organizations that have created assessments and toolkits for diversity, equity, and inclusion. A few of the many resources relied upon are

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included in Appendix II: Additional Resources and Readings. The Task Force recognizes that this list could have extended dozens of pages, but has chosen to use this section as a starting point for identification of resources that will be particularly helpful for future efforts.

### **Data Analysis**

After all phases of the assessment were complete, Task Force members reviewed director presentations and interview notes as well as the focus group questionnaires and small group notes. Task Force members created a coding mechanism to convert these qualitative data points into an analyzable, quantitative dataset. Main categories were generated based on themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts with subtopics under each.

By creating a framework to categorize the current initiatives and those areas where department leadership and staff identified needs, we were able to quantify what measures are working well and can be replicated across the county as well as needs where leadership attention and resources should be focused.

### **Limitations**

The pilot assessment relied exclusively on the resources of the Task Force members, which included our previous experience with research methodologies, time, and existing skill sets. Due to time constraints and lack of established relationships, we were unable to include several departments in the full assessment. Another limitation is that the assessment was based on resources available and limited time/volunteer effort with no budget. In the future, a more thorough assessment can be completed given an additional allocation of resources. Finally, Task Force turnover complicated timelines for completion and continuation of ideas.

The Task Force also acknowledges the lack of diversity in the make-up of the Task Force itself as a limitation during this process. In response to this limitation, the Task Force has made efforts to approach the assessment process with an anti-oppression lens, which includes taking the time to review the process and recommendations carefully, so as not to perpetuate or further contribute to institutional oppression through this process. This also includes being mindful of the reality that diverse staff representation may not have been present during this process due to lack of diversity in county staff make-up to begin with, which further necessitates an anti-oppression lens in the writing of this report.

## **Findings**

### **Data Analysis Results**

Qualitative data analysis yielded results in various categories including: leadership, recruitment, outreach, transparency, retention and training. Our analysis examined conversations with leadership of individual departments and the feedback provided during focus groups independently, but many common themes were identified.

### **Leadership and Transparency**

#### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives**

Feedback from department directors indicated that all departments are making efforts to promote outward, community-facing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, comparatively less internal work is being done by departments to increase the diversity, equity, and inclusion competency of staff and/or create a more inclusive work environment. Directors shared that there is a need for guidance regarding internal diversity,

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equity, and inclusion efforts from higher level administration, as they recognize that even well-meaning efforts without appropriate planning, policy and support can negatively affect the work culture. Several departments discussed efforts focused on internal diversity, but the next steps of equity and inclusion were less prevalent in these conversations.

Results also indicated that several directors are responding to the voices and concerns of their staff and have begun to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within the workplace, even without clear direction via a countywide policy. Examples of initiatives being supported within specific departments include department-specific lactation rooms and work schedule flexibility, though not all departments are providing these options. Leadership expressed a desire for inter-departmental collaboration opportunities to share these and other initiatives happening across the county. Additionally, while these efforts have begun on a department-by-department basis, a review of staff feedback continues to indicate an overall desire for clear messaging regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives as well as accessible opportunities to build awareness in the workplace. Staff also expressed the desire for transparency and inclusion regarding workplace activities and decision making.

### **Standardized Definitions**

Leadership and staff alike voiced a need for county leadership to provide more direction and guidance specific to the county's definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Data analysis across all phases of this assessment also indicated that the need for upper-level administration to provide defined goals and mission related to this work is significant. Department leadership indicated that it would be beneficial to them if county leadership had a set of definitions and goals that could be shared and standardized across all departments, and they were eager to know what definitions were being used by the Task Force. Additionally, staff indicated they would also appreciate increased transparency and information about the work being done by the Task Force as well as county administration to support diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

### **Human Resources**

Department directors referenced a need for increased collaboration and communication between departments and county HR, not just to facilitate and support the hiring and recruitment of new staff, but also regarding retention and overall transparency. During department director conversations, there were references to department leadership being unable to access data regarding staff demographics that might support development and implementation of these practices. At this time, HR is the only department that has access to much of the demographic information gathered during the NEOGOV application process. As such, directors voiced a need for increased collaboration around those demographic data to begin and/or continue the process of better understanding and advocating for their teams' needs.

## **Recruitment and Outreach**

### **Human Resources and Focused Recruitment**

Qualitative analysis identified the need for additional support from HR for all departments around recruitment and outreach strategies and standardization. Department leadership shared a need for support and guidance from county administration and HR in order to more efficiently and effectively recruit and onboard new staff with a diversity, equity, and inclusion focus. All departments indicated that they were eager to explore recruitment and outreach with this focus, recognizing the benefits of building teams made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds and with diverse life experiences. Nearly all departments have already begun to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion recruitment efforts, but all departments would welcome additional support around this process. Several departments voiced a need for specific support from HR in order to either change job description requirements or create a more inclusive interview process.

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### **Community Partnerships**

Department leadership overall indicated a desire to increase the strength of relationships between other departments and external community organizations, including schools, agencies, and career fair organizers to amplify the efficiency of diversity, equity and inclusion recruitment. Departments with stronger community relationships also demonstrated increased ability to access diverse hiring pools. Several directors in this portion of the assessment indicated that they would like to hear about career fairs and recruitment opportunities that might target diverse recruitment pools.

### **Competitive Hiring**

Some departments shared difficulties with recruitment because they do not have a budget to be able to attend certain outreach events, share information about new job postings on paid listservs or websites, or are limited in their ability to offer flexible hiring packages to be competitive to new hires. One department specifically highlighted that while they recognize the need for cognitive diversity in the workplace, due to restrictions around salary, work hours, remote working, and benefits packages, the county is not seen as an attractive employer in the eyes of promising new applicants.

### **Staff Requests**

While the director interviews focused on the vision and perspectives of department leadership, the focus group sessions sought to further assess the viewpoints of staff in general. Focus group data analysis yielded an overall desire by staff to work in a more diverse, representative environment. Participants voiced a need for language accessibility (decreased use of acronyms, accessible onboarding format, etc.) during the hiring process, and shared a unified desire to work in an environment that is more representative of the communities served.

## **Training**

Across all phases of the assessment, training as a category as well as specific trainings received a significant number of responses both in terms of needs as well as strengths. The following results were identified as they pertain to training.

### **Standardized Training**

Directors and staff participants in all phases of the assessment voiced a need for a standardized training curriculum or toolkit to enhance workplace inclusionary efforts. Specifically, results show a need for this standardized curriculum to include training around diversity, equity, and inclusion definitions; county and department diversity, equity, and inclusion goal-setting; how to manage difficult conversations around resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; and overall cultural sensitivity.

### **Community Partnerships**

Focus group feedback highlighted a general staff desire to increase department collaboration with outside community partners to provide training. Staff voiced a desire to have their departments or Snohomish County as a whole partner with community agencies or outside trainers to provide training around diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Staff stated that community-based trainings had thus far been among the most meaningful trainings they had attended around diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, citing the Undoing Institutional Racism training, hosted by the People's Institute Northwest, as an especially meaningful experience.

### **Cultural Sharing**

Focus group participants also highlighted a desire for a greater number of opportunities where cultural or inclusion-related sharing can take place. Staff called out wanting a centralized listserv or website where they can go to learn about upcoming diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings or allyship opportunities. Additionally, staff

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shared that they appreciate lunch-time meetings in central locations and would welcome opportunities for “brown-bag lunch” trainings or events that celebrate staff diversity and inclusion practices.

### Specific Training Requests

The following training topics were most recommended and/or requested by participants in this assessment.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Competencies Training:** Staff expressed a desire for these trainings to increase awareness and education in applying a diversity, equity, and inclusion focus to everyday work practices.

**LGBTQIA+ Allyship:** LGBTQIA+ trainings at all levels, including allyship trainings, were some of the most requested trainings by staff members.

**Intergenerational Communication Styles:** Directors and staff participating in the focus group portion of the assessment shared a need for trainings that would facilitate communication between employees from different generations.

**Unconscious Bias Training:** Participants in all phases shared that they had benefited greatly from attendance at Unconscious Bias trainings and have requested that additional Unconscious Bias trainings be offered to all departments.

### Retention

While initiatives, strengths, and needs related to retention are represented throughout the assessment, data analysis from leadership meetings and the focus groups all produced significant retention-specific results in the areas below.

#### Mentorship

Mentorship of county employees at various levels can be an important retention tool. Of note is the fact that several of the departments participating in this assessment, including PDS, the Sheriff’s Office, Human Services, and Public Works have or are in the process of implementing mentoring programs for at least some of their new employees.

#### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Engagement Opportunities

Director meeting and focus group data called out the desire of current employees and directors to create a more inclusive workspace. Directors recognized the presence of staff who have shown an interest in these initiatives while also voicing a need for a standardized set of tools, trainings, and resources to support staff who remain unsure about engagement in diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. Directors have proposed collaboration across departments to aid in boosting morale for those interested in these initiatives as well as to help teach and engage staff who are not yet knowledgeable about the benefits of an inclusive and expansive work environment. Staff emphasized a desire for increased and standardized learning and sharing opportunities as a way to nurture the continued growth of these initiatives.

#### Current Inclusionary Practices

While department leadership and staff shared their knowledge of current inclusionary practices within the workplace, one initiative stood out across all phases of the assessment: the presence of department-specific lactation rooms and support by management. Staff participating in focus group sessions highlighted how meaningful it was for them to be a part of a department that respected the needs of working mothers and provided safe and comfortable lactation spaces, while also expressing the need to expand this resource in other areas.

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During the focus group sessions, staff identified work schedule flexibility and the ability to work remotely as some of the most mentioned “needs” in the assessment. Staff shared that a flexible work schedule and the ability to work remotely reflected the employer’s ability to accommodate, recognize, and value the diverse needs of staff and their families. Additionally, participants addressed the need for gender-neutral bathrooms on county campuses. Participants also shared a request to have more diverse food options available on campus and at campus events to accommodate different religious or dietary needs. Lastly, they expressed a desire for diversity to be celebrated and honored through identity sharing opportunities starting at the executive level and throughout county departments.

## Recommendations

Based on assessment findings, the Task Force has developed recommendations for consideration by the Executive’s Office on how to create a more inclusive Snohomish County. We present these recommendations designed to further diversity, equity, and inclusion work in the following pages, grouped into four separate categories. The recommendations start with the need for leadership and vision to be displayed at the highest level, with expanded efforts to communicate opportunities to county staff. They then move to building a diverse workforce through recruitment and HR efforts. The recommendations then focus on how the county can support diversity, equity, and inclusion through trainings and ongoing learning opportunities. Finally, the recommendations conclude with ways the county can foster a work environment to retain employees and embody diverse, equitable, and inclusive practices.

### 1. Leadership Expectation and Vision on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

Leadership (the Executive’s Office, in collaboration with County Council) needs to take the initiative to identify and clarify the diversity, equity, and inclusion definitions, policies, practices, and procedures for the county, highlight their priority, and convey this vision through all county departments and elected positions. Development of specific practices, procedures, and policies are necessary to enforce and hold accountable individuals and departments in enacting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Having explicit goals and a common understanding of what is meant by these terms will not only bring greater understanding among county employees, but will also help us all build a stronger foundation to advance the work recommended in this report as well as the efforts that are already underway in various departments and offices.

#### **Recommendation 1.1: Adopt Definitions and Visual Depiction of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

The Task Force recommends that the Executive’s Office adopt language and definitions surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion work, and distribute definitions throughout all agencies and departments. Starting with definitions for the words diversity, equity, and inclusion will help county employees come to a common understanding, allowing for more meaningful conversations and the ability to make more informed decisions. Appendix III contains the Task Force’s proposed definitions. Regarding the proposed visual depiction in Appendix III, we have included annotation that describes how the image conveys the intent of the definitions.

Department leaders need to have an understanding of these shared definitions so they can direct their staff on how to appropriately convey diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and procedures throughout their

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departments. Several directors we interviewed specifically asked for us to give them definitions as part of our work so they could put them to use immediately, and each director welcomed using specific definitions if they were presented. Any current and future work that uses these terms by individual departments and offices, including mission statements, goals, policies, guidance, etc., will benefit from agreed-upon definitions.

### **Recommendation 1.2: Champion Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion through Leadership and Accountability**

Having the Executive's Office champion the efforts of county departments surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion is key to demonstrating the importance of this work in Snohomish County. Ensuring that department directors are aware of opportunities for learning exercises, trainings, and collaborative projects with each other is essential; individual departments will both engage with these resources and recognize that they are fully authorized and encouraged to engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Accountability can and should be met through the creation of a uniform set of metrics, as developed by the executive's office, which each department can further utilize. Such metrics can include each department creating their own specific diversity, equity, and inclusion goals, reporting back to the executive on a scheduled, ongoing basis. Along with developing specific metrics, the county needs to determine what data should be collected/measured, require departments to do so, and encourage data-driven decisions where possible. We can't manage well what we can't measure, and the most vocal or connected voices shouldn't always drive decisions.

### **Recommendation 1.3: Continue and Expand Executive Office Communications**

Executive Office communications, including countywide emails and utilization of Countywide Pride, need to clearly express the executive's vision on diversity, equity, and inclusion, and what this entails for every staff member employed by the county. This also needs to delve into either current or newly drafted policies and procedures, including information on how employees are able to reach the Task Force for further explanations, clarifications, and navigation of services related to this work. Staff interviewed by the Task Force relayed their appreciation for previous communications delivered by the executive's office, but also encouraged more engagement with county staff on those items, and more opportunities to learn, appreciate, and celebrate different holidays, cultures, and leaders.

### **Recommendation 1.4: Expand Collaborative Efforts and Opportunities between Departments**

The Task Force recommends that the Executive's Office create opportunities and events for collaborative efforts between departments under the executive, other elected officials and the departments they lead, the judiciary, the County Council, and the employed staff of the county. These opportunities and venues can be online or in-person but should allow a venue for sharing and discussing policy ideas, celebrating inclusion efforts by individual departments, and expansion of recruitment efforts by sharing listserv operations. Some success has occurred in allowing inter-departmental sharing of lactation rooms once such resources became known between departments. An organized forum or symposium, where each department can showcase the diversity, equity, and inclusion work and efforts they have undertaken would also be an opportunity to further develop collaboration within the county.



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## 2. Human Resources and Hiring Practices

Recruitment of new staff remains an open issue through a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. How individuals are recruited relies on several factors, such as meeting potential candidates where they are, expanding awareness campaigns and access to organizations which cater to and assist disenfranchised groups, and ensuring that the protocols for supporting staff once brought on by the county remain current and maintain a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

In addition, the April 2019 passage of the Washington State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Act, also known as I-1000, affected the ability of public entities to use an individual's "protected class" in hiring decisions, promotions, and other job-related advancement. However, the new law also prohibits the county from using any protected-class characteristic as the sole factor in hiring a less-qualified candidate over a more-qualified candidate. The Task Force believes that this may be a valuable tool in addressing some of the outreach, hiring, and retention goals for Snohomish County, but executive guidance is needed for departments to know how and when they are able to leverage the act.

### **Recommendation 2.1: Implement Strategic Job Outreach and Recruitment Efforts**

Enhance recruitment to increase a diverse applicant pool. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as new strategies for outreach, updated job posting listservs, and participation in career fairs beyond the set standard. We also recommend developing new language for program and job descriptions found on NEOGOV, including the removal of certain requirements, such as driver's licenses or higher education requirements (unless necessary for the job), the ability for applications to be translated into multiple languages, avoiding the use of acronyms that are county/program specific, and the addition of an inclusivity statement within job descriptions.

### **Recommendation 2.2: Evaluate and Modify NEOGOV Practices**

The Task Force has been told that applicant demographic information collected on NEOGOV is for specific reporting purposes and is not made available or accessible to hiring committees. The Task Force recommends reviewing each department's use of NEOGOV and permission settings to confirm that the process is working as intended. Further, the Task Force recommends that the Executive's Office provide goals, guidance, and resources for implementation of diverse hiring panels and restructuring of the NEOGOV website regarding question creation, structure, and usability. These fixes seem to be low cost and low effort. For example, the response of "two or more races" was not previously an option when completing the demographic section of county job applications, and this was brought up by the Task Force to HR during a phase of this assessment. Within a week, HR added this option across the entire NEOGOV platform to provide an opportunity for individuals to more accurately reflect their racial identity when applying for a job with the county. While this question was changed for incoming employees, it does not provide an opportunity for existing staff to self-identify their demographic information more broadly. Therefore, the Task Force also recommends an effort to provide an opportunity for existing staff to update all demographic information in the internal EMSS system.

### **Recommendation 2.3: Request Legal Guidance on the Washington State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Act (Initiative 1000)**

The Washington State Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Act addresses the use of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin, age, sexual orientation, any sensory, mental, or physical disability, or honorably discharged veteran or military status in hiring and promotions. The Act allows use of these characteristics in some ways but prohibits their use in others. Because many county departments conduct their own hiring and may be unaware of these recent changes in the law, the Task Force asks the Executive's Office to formally request a written opinion from the Prosecuting Attorney or Attorney General to clarify how this new law can and cannot be used



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by departments within the county. We would then recommend that this opinion be distributed to the heads of those departments informing them of what can and cannot be done under the new act.

#### **Recommendation 2.4: Restructure the Human Resources Department**

The current decentralized structure does not suit the needs of either the county or the staff they serve. In following the results of the recent audit performed on HR, we recommend that the county adopt the recommendations found in the audit. We also add that Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Officer accessibility and interdepartmental collaboration and training is necessary for HR to be successful in its duties. Recentralizing HR would have the added benefit of allowing policy changes to be made at a single point rather than through individual HR actors in each department. Changes such as unique processes and requirements for non-traditional family structures are increasing in importance for new and current hires. The current structure of HR does not make these reforms easier to implement uniformly across all county departments. Staffing issues for the department remain a key need to its efficiency and operation, as deadlines need to be met, so processing of requests needs to remain a top priority. Reporting and investigations are also top priorities, and we recommend that HR review its procedures surrounding department access to aggregated personnel data, as well as reexamining efforts to ensure that candidate demographic data does not unnecessarily enter the hiring process.

### **3. Ongoing Training Opportunities and Continuously-Available Resources**

In an effort to encourage a growth mindset within the county, and to ensure that topics such as diversity, equity, and inclusion work, allyship, and unconscious bias awareness are continuously fostered, a collection of training materials and a training coordinator are necessary tools. Topics of discussion may range widely, and conversations that require constant nurturing, that regularly enhance and inform day-to-day operations while placing staff at ease with changing demographics and structures within the county, is essential to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

#### **Recommendation 3.1: Develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training Toolkit**

The study and creation of a series of trainings to cultivate conversation, understanding, and acceptance, and that would be available online and accessible through all departments is a necessity for the county. Core trainings should recognize the different backgrounds and lived experiences of county employees. Once these have been established, training should be expanded to multiple fronts and curricula. Trainings that are important include: how to have difficult conversations, unconscious bias, generational competency, LGBTQIA+ terminology and sensitivity, cultural diversity, de-escalation and conflict management, pronoun use, disability awareness, and intersectionality. Trainings need to be for staff and leadership alike, and pilot programs will need to be implemented through participating, eager departments. External trainers would ensure an objective view to diversity, equity, and inclusion work, allowing participants to feel comfortable expressing items for growth and understanding.

#### **Recommendation 3.2: Create Training Coordinator Position(s)**

The Task Force recommends the creation and development of training coordinator position(s) with the benefits and funding of a full time position and an operational budget. The specific duties of this position will be to administer diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings for department leadership and their staff, collaborate with other departments lead by elected officials, monitor and update the training toolkit, arrange for outside trainers to come to the county to train staff on items found in and outside of the training toolkit, develop rapport with each division and department, work with onboarding staff in HR and departments to affect real strategies for retention, and work with the EEO Office and Officer to determine diversity, equity, and inclusion implications of

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investigations and reporting for county and federal purposes. This position would also arrange collaborative and shared-experience events for the county to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies, and provide data regarding surveys and reportable statistics (demographics, retention, etc.) for county/state reporting and guidelines.

## 4. Retention of Staff through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens

The Task Force recognizes the hard work that is already happening around diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as the retention of a diverse workforce. Retention is the key to maintaining diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workforce of Snohomish County. Individuals who feel like they belong, are valued, and are supported in a welcome environment at their place of employment are willing to spread that message to the general population, which in turn can lead them to recruit people who would expand that same diversity, equity, and inclusion work in their divisions and departments. How the county manages this process, therefore, is an important step in furthering diversity, equity, and inclusion work, and ensuring that members of the staff are heard, respected, and valued as individuals and as human beings.

### **Recommendation 4.1: Implement Infrastructure Changes Around the County**

Infrastructure changes include improvements to buildings as well as staff resources and communication tools to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many of these changes benefit not only staff members but also those who come to the county to complete their business and who may require increased signage surrounding these added spaces.

Facility changes recommended for the county include accessible bathrooms and entryways to all offices, gender-neutral bathroom options, dedicated personal/prayer use spaces, and improvements to signage and education opportunities around the county to increase understanding around the use of additional spaces. On their own, individual departments have created lactation rooms after receiving feedback that the option in the basement of Admin West was seen as insufficient to serve the number of employees needing to use it. These individual rooms have been reported as an improvement, and comments during the focus groups called out a need for continued development of these sorts of spaces, coupled with messaging about their existence and options for employee use.

Additional staff resource changes include updates to the email signature template, specifically regarding preferred pronoun use and languages spoken, as well as the option of adding preferred pronouns and language diversity on county business cards. Further engagement and planning with each specific department, as well as the Task Force, will be necessary in order to underlie changes in existing policies, to fully carry out this recommendation.

### **Recommendation 4.2: Increase Transparency and Equitable Access, Including Participation in Decision Making and Knowledge Sharing**

Increased transparency relating to management decisions, equitable access to opportunities including the ability to participate and be heard when decisions are made, and the sharing of knowledge are fundamental to an equitable and inclusive work environment. These actions support improved collaborative approaches and trust in management by employees. A key recommendation includes development of internal promotion opportunities and mentorship for staff, including succession planning and how continuity of knowledge will be maintained for each department (e.g., placing these items online, or in readily accessible binders/locations), so members not in succession plans also have access, accountability, and opportunities to learn. Decisions on the opportunities for promotions and succession need to be made in an open environment, rather than behind closed doors, to increase transparency and equitable access to these opportunities.

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It serves us all better to include more diverse voices and opinions when management decides which programs, projects, and initiatives are developed within each department. The Task Force recommends increased transparency by actively recruiting and allowing for more diverse employee participation in the initial and ongoing stages of planning the county's work. Because knowledge is power and opens doors for more creativity, ideas, and improved decision making and processes, management should develop additional ways for knowledge to be shared with all employees. This will help further break down barriers to an equitable and inclusive work environment.

These items better enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by assuring that individuals have equitable access to information, understanding, and accountability. Equity and inclusion are built on staff trust of division and department leadership, which can only be earned if staff members feel valued and are allowed to equally participate and collaborate with management on vital issues affecting their employment and their lives. Other recommended strategies include work flexibility, accommodations for individuals with medical issues, working families, and the ability for individuals to work from home, which are simple and highly effective changes that will move this work forward. These strategies will lead to the retention of good employees, creating a better environment within the county staff structure.

### **Recommendation 4.3: Create and Support an Environment that Appreciates Diversity**

Appreciation of diverse cultures needs to be adopted as a normal course of action undertaken by the county. This includes opportunities for cultural sharing (where we learn about differences and promote educational opportunities for further understanding and acceptance); support for diverse food options at meetings or gatherings that take into consideration different religious, medical, and cultural food needs; as well as reminders of a variety of significant cultural dates, anniversaries, and holidays. These opportunities need to be made available for divisions, departments, and the Executive's Office, connecting back to diversity, equity, and inclusion visions from the executive, setting the tone from the top down. The goal is to foster exposure to differences, and, while not forcing people to engage, accentuating situational awareness in diverse settings.

## **Next Steps**

We would like to thank Executive Somers and the Executive's Office for tasking us with taking the initial steps to assess the diversity, equity, and inclusion practices within Snohomish County Government. Thank you for the opportunity to create this assessment and for the demonstrated leadership in moving this project forward. This assessment will serve as the foundation from which the Task Force will continue its work over the coming years. Our recommendations are intended to be broad overviews, but we have already discussed and are more than willing to develop specific action items, schedules, baseline reporting goals, and implementation methods for each of the above recommendations. In addition, as mentioned previously, we know that there are many other departments and efforts working to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion within our workplace, and we intend to continue meeting with these groups in the upcoming year.

We would like to continue working closely with the Executive's Office and collaborating with departments in determining which of our recommendations to prioritize and begin working on as soon as possible. To that end we would ask for a meeting with the executive to discuss the findings and recommendations of this assessment and to explore efforts for implementation.

Sincerely,  
Your Equity and Inclusion Task Force

# Appendix I

## Existing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts

During meetings with department leadership, the Task Force identified several efforts that already implement our four broad recommendations. The table below summarizes these efforts, and the following pages include more detailed description of efforts that have been implemented by individual departments.

<p><b>Leadership Expectation and Vision on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management readings/discussions:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “White Fragility” by Robin DiAngelo</li> <li>○ “We Can’t Talk About That at Work!” by Mary-Frances Winters</li> <li>○ “Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance” by Edgar Villanueva</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Updates to internal department mission statement, values, and philosophy to include equity.</li> <li>• Management having discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, including cultural sensitivity and understanding.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Human Resources and Hiring Practices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized onboarding training at department level</li> <li>• Attendance at Career Fairs             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Public Sector Career Fair</li> <li>○ Multicultural Career Fair</li> <li>○ High schools</li> <li>○ Community colleges</li> <li>○ Women’s clubs/groups</li> <li>○ Military job fairs</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Job Postings             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Craigslist</li> <li>○ Community boards (such as grocery stores)</li> <li>○ Familias Unidas</li> <li>○ Refugee Community List</li> </ul> </li> <li>• HR contacts within departments make themselves available for follow-up support and connect with current staff who are willing to talk with prospective employees</li> <li>• Identification of multilingual staff and other diversity characteristics shared in welcome email to department</li> </ul>
<p><b>Ongoing Training Opportunities and Continuously Available Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community speakers</li> <li>• Institutional Bias training</li> <li>• Implicit Bias training</li> <li>• Civility in the Workplace training</li> <li>• Uncovering Unconscious Bias Training by Bam Mendiola</li> <li>• Leadership Academy – department training for staff who are interested in leadership positions within the department</li> <li>• Mentoring programs within departments</li> </ul>	<p><b>Retention of Staff through a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot program for remote work policies</li> <li>• Flexible work schedules</li> <li>• Dedicated lactation room</li> <li>• International food festival</li> <li>• Holiday celebrations</li> </ul>

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## Department Meeting Notes

### PDS

PDS serves many functions, including development permitting, long-term planning (code writing and policies), the Fire Marshal's Office, Code Enforcement, and technology and administrative services. The department consists of about 140 employees, 44% of whom are women. The department does not have access to any other demographic information, so further breakdowns are unavailable.

**Recruiting and hiring:** PDS utilizes free job posting sites such as Government Jobs, Indeed, and association websites for specific professional organizations. It is not customary for PDS to pay to advertise jobs, and they also will not post on sites that require individual login accounts because such accounts are too cumbersome to maintain and are not an efficient use of time. PDS has been intentional in hiring staff that can bring new skills and excellent customer service to the department. After an employee is hired, PDS tracks additional diversity information such as gender and languages spoken. Using this department data, we know that last year PDS hired 24 new employees, and that 50% were women and 25% spoke at least one language in addition to English.

**Retention:** PDS helped pioneer the pilot project for remote work policies, and several divisions offer the option for flexible work schedules. Last year, to help support working mothers, PDS converted a storage closet to a lactation room. The PDS Fun Committee, a staff-led group created with authorization and support from management, hosts several events to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion such as international food potlucks, holiday celebrations, and lunchtime Zumba/dancing where people have shared dances representing their cultures.

**Leadership support and mentoring:** PDS hosts a leadership academy, which is a one-year training led by the management team, and for which all staff are eligible to apply. There is also a mentorship program to promote cross-training, giving staff an opportunity to learn about skills for which they may not have first-hand experience.

**Next steps:** PDS has been actively planning for workforce transitions. They identified that it would be helpful to have classes and training for PDS leadership regarding how different generations like to be treated and how they like to get their work done, which would assist with retention and creating a workplace that attracts diverse applicants.

Not unlike several other departments, PDS focuses on customer service and collaboration with external partners, which is reflected in its mission statement, values, and philosophy. The department has defined success for internal diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts as meaning that people feel honored, loved, and respected. The director is trying to model compassion and respect as a way to treat people, but this is from her own moral values, not because it is a direction or requirement. PDS has hired and promoted staff and management with a similar mindset and has presented this as an expectation of leadership. PDS is working with its leadership team to teach them to have conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. They recently did a leadership assessment and found that cultural sensitivity and understanding are an area of growth for the team.

PDS leadership noted that the county needs working definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as vision and goals so that there is a common understanding of what is being discussed and how to move forward. They stated that, as growth occurs, county departments need to be prepared to address these issues. Some needed resources identified by PDS were a curriculum of diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings, assistance

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with recruitment, and a centralized “diverse recruiting” strategy. PDS is proud of their efforts to pilot the remote work policy and provide flexible work schedules, and is interested in partnering with Executive Somers and the Task Force to be a test case for new trainings and strategies before they are rolled out to the entire county.

## Public Works

Public Works consists of approximately 600 employees in several work groups: Transportation and Environmental Services (TES), Engineering Services (ES), Road Maintenance (RM), Solid Waste (SW), and Surface Water Management (SWM). Thanks to Title VI reporting requirements, which make demographic data available, the Task Force was told that the department is about 30% women and 19% non-white/Caucasian.

**Recruiting and hiring:** Public Works recruits through traditional means of job fairs, events for high school students, through the American Public Works Association (APWA), and through colleges. They also have been using non-traditional methods such as posting on craigslist and sharing flyers on bulletin boards. The department has several supported employees and also offers internships.

**Retention:** RM, SWM, and ES have all provided lactation rooms, which can be used by other division staff. SWM also participated in a pilot program with flexible work schedules, and Public Works as a whole offers flexible schedules in other divisions. Public Works has a stated zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment. When discrimination and harassment complaints occur, they perform investigations and work with HR and union representatives. During any allegation, staff are provided coaching and/or counseling to help the employee understand what is appropriate.

**Training:** SW brings in a consultant to conduct a “civility in the workplace” training every few years. Additionally, they started a mentoring program for new employees, where supervisors and leads identify subject matter experts with relevant skillsets and temperaments to assist in the onboarding process.

**Next steps:** PW had several ideas where the county and Task Force specifically could assist the department in building relationships with external organizations to increase the diversity of recruits and new employees. Additional ideas included: developing trainings regarding bias and aging in the workforce, increasing EEO support to departments, and continuing to follow the HR diversity requirements for interview panels, while working to increase the presence of women and minority employees during the hiring process.

Public Works’ vision is for “a healthy, connected, safe and resilient community for all who live, work, or play in Snohomish County.” Not surprisingly, many of the department’s efforts are external in nature, including communications with members of the public and compliance with state and federal laws. While the department does not have official diversity, equity, and inclusion goals, they have general ambitions that they want the workforce to reflect the communities it serves, want all groups to be treated the same, and want to eliminate barriers that prevent people from applying for and working at Snohomish County. One way that ES is doing this is by revising and improving job descriptions, and all divisions support updating county job descriptions to avoid unnecessary restrictive requirements that may limit applicants.

Public Works would like assistance in identifying opportunities to improve public outreach. They were also very interested in learning what other departments are doing relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion to assist not only in identifying what their next steps should be, but also identifying areas for improvement that may have gone unnoticed. They also noted a need for training and educational resources for leadership, existing staff, and new staff.



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The leadership of Public Works noted that the department is generally very receptive to new ideas if it is accompanied by a well thought-out plan for implementation. When asked about the department's progress regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, they noted the expansion of translations for Title VI, providing better access to online services, and the increase in diversity of PW management, with the very diverse TES management team as a good example.

## Sheriff's Office

The Sheriff's Office is home to approximately 700 employees with a near-even split between commissioned officers and corrections officers. The office develops its own vision, mission, and identified values as a day-to-day guide for employees to achieve. Specific demographic information is not known at this time.

**Recruiting and hiring:** The Sheriff's Office has had a strong demand for new recruits. To maintain employment, the full-time recruiting team travels to a variety of job fairs including women's job fairs, military installations, and college career fairs between Bellingham and Olympia and as far as Idaho. This extensive outreach has had the added benefit of beginning to diversify the Sheriff's Office. The Sheriff's Office also identified unique barriers related to the civil service examination which applicants must pass in the very initial stages of the hiring process and controls the pool from which they can hire.

**Retention:** Promotions in the Sheriff's Office are largely overseen by the civil service board. This process has the added benefit of removing some instances where discretion, and thus implicit bias, may otherwise be introduced. The Sheriff's Office also spoke of affirmative steps recently undertaken to retain deputies who spoke a native language other than English, by providing additional resources to achieve the required proficiency level.

**Training:** Members of the Sheriff's Office undergo a large amount of mandatory training although it appeared that most cultural competencies are developed on-the-job. Relevant trainings include annual Biased Policing and Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) and the Criminal Justice Training Academy's discretionary classes such as Diversity in Policing and Implicit Bias. HR has also conducted training with the Sheriff's Office supervisors. Leadership expressed some interest in additional leadership trainings on the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Next steps:** Department representatives expressed an apparent willingness to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts into the day-to-day values of the Sheriff's Office. While significant efforts are being made for recruiting, leadership agreed that more can be done to bring this focus into these efforts.

Because of the unique nature of the civil service examination, most recruitment and outreach efforts are focused on convincing potential applicants to take the civil service examination which is conducted by an external corporation. Only those candidates who score high enough are moved on to oral board examinations with the Sheriff's Office. Lateral hires from other agencies are not required to undergo this process and allow for some additional affirmative recruitment efforts. However, lateral hires comprise approximately 5-10% of hiring.

While leadership identified some individual instances of efforts that should be celebrated, there did not appear to be a clear overarching strategy related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It was stated that using the Task Force's working definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion internally when dealing with leadership/supervisor training and hiring strategies would be a good start. While there were no significant barriers to implementing an overarching diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy, leadership appeared to suggest both a need for training or

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assistance and that a clear demonstration of the vision from their command would be necessary before advancing action items.

## Human Services

Providing services covering a wide range of community needs including elderly and disabled supports, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health counseling, and early childhood education, as well as employment, weatherization, homeless housing, and veteran services, Human Services is one of the most public-facing departments within Snohomish County, and is comprised of approximately 250 employees. Additional employee demographic data is not available at this time.

**Recruiting and hiring:** Leadership within Human Services believes that an expansion of recruitment pools is necessary to ensure diversity among job candidates. Expanding job posting reach to gain more diverse exposure is something they stated they will pursue. They also mentioned that refining questions asked of interviewees, including those that ask of experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion, while at the same time providing a key for interviewers on what points an answer should entail, are ideas that can help to establish an intentional diversity, equity, and inclusion focus to the interview process.

**Equity:** It is the belief of Human Services that persons in our community who live on the margins, as well as subcontractors and vendors, are deserving of respect and dignity when interacting with county staff, and should always feel safe and welcome. Leadership also pointed out that one way success can be defined is having staff feel that they can be authentic and comfortable in their work environment.

**Retention:** The discussion centered on revamping and reissuing the department's employee handbook, making it more accessible to read and understand, as well as ensuring that supervisors are engaged with their new hires throughout the entire onboarding process. Department leadership has noticed that some employees may benefit from the option of having a sort of mentor/buddy during their first months on the job, to act as a resource for non-task-related items such as where to go for answers to everyday workplace questions, the protocol on the closing of an office due to inclement weather, or simply to help make connections in the workplace. Leadership would like to seek employee feedback, perhaps through specific focus groups, to discuss these and other retention ideas.

**Training:** Department leadership recognizes that staff need comprehensive and absorbable training, and they are working with HR to move this work forward. They are also looking into the process of creating a training coordinator position, to assist with planning diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused as well as other beneficial trainings to internal staff, and potentially extending to the agencies we partner with as well. One-off trainings can be helpful, but a consistent message, accompanied with a more complete toolkit can help staff in being better stewards, benefitting the clientele we serve, and the county as a whole.

Another point leadership within Human Services is working to enact is the idea of decolonizing wealth. The idea is focused on the belief that providers and vendors in the community that have business with the county should feel like partners, and not supplicants, in receiving funding for services. Lowering the barriers to capital access, increasing interactions with members of the community and the vendors that serve them, and maintaining compliance regulations without demanding certain reports or items for payment of services are ways Human Services can assist in equity work. The recognition that there may be gaps in diversity, equity, and inclusion awareness among our staff is also important, and it is necessary to foster a culture where there is a positive response by staff after such a realization has been made.



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## Other Departments

### Department of Information Technology

At the time of the Task Force meeting with DoIT, the department had 88 employees, with nearly one-third in non-technical roles (such as the mailroom, print shop, payroll, etc.). DoIT has been evaluating their workforce planning efforts and when retirements occur they are using the opportunity to re-evaluate skillsets needed, including job qualifications and job descriptions, prior to filling vacant positions. Part of their new hiring strategy includes asking “what can the person bring to the table that is different” as opposed to asking “how will they fit in?” DoIT noted that the technology field in general is primarily made up of men, and that they have difficulty recruiting a diverse applicant pool.

DoIT, similar to other departments, has also experienced difficulties with recruitment in general, which they attributed to a variety of factors that are exacerbated by the pay and benefit discrepancies compared to other tech jobs in the region. They have implemented telecommuting policies and are providing resources so that staff can work remotely. They have found that they are most successful at attracting employees that want to avoid long commutes and are looking for a better work-life balance. In the future, DoIT expressed interest in receiving assistance in recruitment to help with outreach to diverse communities and trade publications. They also stated that, as a service provider, multilingual, ADA, and visual and hearing supports are opportunities for growth across county services.

### Human Resources

Decentralization of HR has led to mixed results regarding efficacy and management. Snohomish County HR is decentralized, so the components of hiring and retention practices are staffed by individuals in each department, as opposed to having a more centralized HR department where each of those processes would be under the guidance of one official or office. This has resulted in different departments enacting differing strategies and procedures in their hiring and retention protocols. This can lead to inequity, as there is not a set standard under which each agency or department should operate. The reach of these potential inequities includes recruitment strategies, ensuring that pools of applicants are diverse, and paperwork and hiring/interview panels following the same standards and guidelines.

The Task Force was pointed to an HR Audit completed by an outside organization, Sjoberg Evashenk Consulting, Inc., which also outlined these issues. The results of the audit were delivered to the Snohomish County Council, and the conclusions drawn included that there needed to be better coordination with HR units across all departments if it is to remain decentralized, reducing the number of direct-reporting staff of the director, and to conduct a rate and classification study for defined description of roles and compensation.

Apart from the previously defined issues, HR staffing remains an issue, stretching the department and preventing the time for a complete review of systems and practices including diversity, equity, and inclusion work. It was expressed that HR would benefit from a full-time position to lead that work, separate from the EEO Officer for the county. This individual could lead trainings, analyze practices across all county departments, and complete the work of determining and enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion on all county campuses. Leadership training on such issues was also seen as beneficial, so that practices and procedures remain consistent and similarly enforced across all county functions and offices, even those with different elected leaders.

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### **Snohomish County Human Rights Commission (HRC) Summary**

A representative from HR, who also serves as a liaison to the HRC, presented to the Task Force to help explain the roles and responsibilities of the HRC, as well as its history. The HRC is an advisory commission that provides education and outreach to communities. They do not have investigative authority, so they forward anything that would warrant an investigation to the Washington State Human Rights Commission. Snohomish County HRC's mission is to "promote inclusion and equity for all people and the elimination of discrimination through establishing partnerships within our community and defend the human rights for all." Their focus is external, working with the community, and they do not review or advise on any topics regarding internal county policy. This is an important distinction between the Task Force and the HRC, and is an area where the Task Force is careful to not duplicate efforts, but is also working to identify when collaboration would be beneficial to both groups. The HRC has monthly commissioner meetings and attends or hosts several forums and community events throughout the year, including an International Human Rights Day.

### **Public Advocate**

The Snohomish County Public Advocate met with the Task Force to discuss the parameters of the job, and how those efforts can align with Task Force goals. In explaining her duties, the big takeaway is the advocacy delivered through the office; while dealing largely with people who are unfamiliar with government processes, the public advocate hears the public's concerns and complaints, working to explain and point people to the right place to receive services. Originally, the position was that of the county ombudsman, serving as the eyes and ears for the constituents of the county. It serves in a neutral role, independent of the county executive and the county council. The public advocate has investigative and interview authority, in an effort to reach the best conclusion for any case brought before the office. The office helps to ensure that county policies are applied equitably and fairly.

Advocating for welcoming signage around the county campus and answering constituent complaints issued through online forums such as Facebook and through email are also ways in which the public advocate is extending the county's support to its residents. Above all is giving the county the means to be held accountable by its citizens. When individuals come to the county, and are not sure how to receive services, or are upset with how an interaction or result occurred, the public advocate can be a bridge to resolving the conflict, making sure that both parties are in the best position moving forward. Ensuring that county policy is followed, and applied equitably, is the most fundamental function of the office; ensuring equity throughout the county by reducing the barriers residents may face to quickly resolving their issues remains a top priority.

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# Appendix II

## Additional Resources and Readings

The following are a sampling of some of the many resources that the Task Force relied on in the execution of this assessment. The list also highlights some of the work other jurisdictions have undertaken to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace: Why It Matters

- **McKinsey & Company**, a global consulting firm, has conducted multiple studies exploring the benefits of utilizing diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and values in the workplace. With multiple publications, McKinsey's most recent 2018 findings titled, "Delivering through Diversity," in conjunction with a 2015 publication addressing the importance of diversity in the workplace, highlight the benefits to both employer and employee when diversity is emphasized in the workplace.  
<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity>  
<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/why-diversity-matters>
- Large scale publications, including **Forbes Magazine**, have also highlighted the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion practices in the workplace. The article below, written in 2009, outlines additional findings related to implementation of these recommended practices.  
<https://www.forbes.com/2009/06/02/diversity-collaboration-teams-leadership-managing-creativity.html#4060eb89f73b>.
- **Rocio Lorenzo**, known for her work at the Boston Consulting Group, along with her team, have led additional studies which clearly demonstrate that increased diversity and inclusion in the workplace boost innovation. Below is the link to a TED Talk related to this work.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/rocio\\_lorenzo\\_want\\_a\\_more\\_innovative\\_company\\_hire\\_more\\_women?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/rocio_lorenzo_want_a_more_innovative_company_hire_more_women?language=en)

### Efforts by Neighboring Jurisdictions

- **Pierce County** has published a commitment to diversity on their website, which focuses on celebrating differences and sustaining an inclusive work environment. The effort is led by their Human Resources department. In addition to providing several resources to staff (such as comprehensive information about EEO policies and how to file a complaint), Pierce County also has a diversity training program focusing on organizational development and equity, and they are working on a total compensation study.  
<https://www.co.pierce.wa.us/1233/Commitment-to-Diversity>  
<https://piercecountywa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/2340/2018-Training-Schedule?bidId=>
- **King County** has established an Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan highlighting four countywide strategies:
  - Investing upstream and where needs are greatest.
  - Investing in community partnerships.
  - Investing in employees.

- 
- Accountable leadership.

To accomplish the tasks laid out by their strategic plan, King County employs a team of highly trained staff to interface with community members, staff, and county leadership. Their internally-focused initiatives include prioritization of equity best practices in the hiring, retention, and promotion of diverse staff.

<https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/strategic-plan.aspx>.

- The **City of Seattle** has created a Workforce Equity Strategic Plan that emerged from an effort similar to the Equity and Inclusion Task Force. They have also implemented extended family leave, extended parental leave, and Unbiased Employment Decision Training. The City of Seattle consolidated their Human Resources department and created a Workforce Equity Project Manager position. Under this Workforce Equity group, they have an anti-harassment interdepartmental team.

<https://www.seattle.gov/human-resources/our-commitment-to-workforce-equity>.

## Training Resources

- The **Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)** is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. GARE works with governmental jurisdictions, offering a variety of trainings and services, including year-long cohorts for jurisdictions to begin doing racial equity work, while providing additional best practices, tools, and resources to continue to build and sustain efforts. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), City of Lynnwood, City of Tacoma, City Tukwila, City of Seattle, and City of Olympia are a sampling of the jurisdictions that have joined GARE.

<https://www.racialequityalliance.org/>

- The **Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN)** is a membership organization which connects local government practitioners to accelerate urban sustainability. Snohomish County is a member of USDN, and starting in August the Task Force will participating in the USDN Equity Foundations program, which is a free training offered to its members. The goals of the program are to: develop shared language and analysis, create a plan for integrating equity into programs, and to build a team of people to work together on racial equity.

<https://www.usdn.org/public/page/55/Equity-Foundations-Training>

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# Appendix III

## Recommended Definitions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

**Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, encompassing the characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. Diversity brings together ideas from people of varying backgrounds and experiences in order to grasp a fuller, broader range of thoughts, feelings, and interactions among members of a community. **Diversity means representation.**

**Equity** is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups. It is when everyone has access to the opportunities necessary to satisfy their essential needs, advance their well-being, and achieve their full potential. Equity does not mean everyone receives the same, but rather that everyone has the same access to shared resources. **Equity means access.**

**Inclusion** is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. It means everyone can participate and everyone belongs. Inclusion recognizes our universal similarities and interdependence, despite our differences. **Inclusion means belonging.**



**Diversity:** reflected in the people shown.

**Equity:** reflected by each person having equal opportunity to a leaf.

**Inclusion:** reflected by the circle made of Snohomish County colors of red, blue, and green, including people with equitable opportunity within the circle.